

January 2, 2013

## Wednesday's Words of Quality

### Liker on Leadership, Culture and Likely Success with Lean and PDCA Problem Solving

To all employees of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine,

We are now entering our 8th year of Lean management in Pathology and Laboratory Medicine and we are still learning. Other laboratories may have in common aspects of technology, instruments, couriers, information systems, and daily defects that don't please clients. But they don't have the one thing that our integrated laboratories of the Henry Ford Health System have and that is you. You and the laboratory culture in which we work together define our success in Lean and our ability to problem solve daily and effectively.

This year to assist in our shared goal of effective Lean management, we will be rolling out monthly Lean educational modules for managers and employees that contain improved insights based on our learnings of the past 7 years. We will be looking for your wisdom and feedback in these short sessions.

I saved the following words, below, from Professor Liker related to leadership, management and culture that I thought might shed some light on all of our roles in contributing to the success of this enterprise. This year will be a challenge but let's show 'em what we are capable of in 2013!

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**Lean, six sigma, and lean six sigma have now been practiced by organizations in all sectors throughout the world for many years. The basic concepts trace back more than 50 years. There are many positive reports of companies that have literally changed the game in their industries using these methods and management principles. Unfortunately there are many more that have been disappointed by clear improvements in processes that slip backward and reported cost savings that mysteriously disappear over time.**

**We believe that path to sustainable competitive advantage, is leaders shaping a culture of continuous improvement. Organizations that have had long-term success in many different cultures have in common leaders with certain characteristics. They are passionate about satisfying customers, believe people are their most valuable resource, and view lean transformation as the evolution of a culture in which all employees are engaged in, and expected to, constantly question how they do their work and how they can better serve customers. When these leaders are transferred or leave the company often the exciting transformations they have led slip back toward mediocrity. The problem is that these leaders too often seem to appear almost randomly and are not systematically selected and developed. Moreover, leaders are not acting as teachers and coaches who develop deep bench strength so that the next leader up has the same level of vision and skill to evolve the culture.**

## Key Messages:

1. Culture is complex and operates at multiple levels--Culture can be seen at the surface level of artifacts, at the level of shared values, and most deeply at the level of underlying assumptions. Culture evolves in complex ways as a result of nation, industry, company, and subcultural values and beliefs.
2. The complexity of culture change is vastly underestimated--Culture change in many organizations is delegated to human resources or some other staff functions that plans on "deployment of culture" through training sessions, media campaigns, new reward systems, and projects. They usually fail to understand that culture change must target the deep personal level of new ways of thinking and behaving which can only be influenced by ongoing learning cycles on the job with the help of coaches.
3. Much of lean management that is viewed as a toolkit to operate on process improvement is intended within the Toyota Way to provide opportunities for developing people and culture and are very powerful if used correctly.
4. Strong models for personal and culture change abound such as the master-apprentice relationship, religious conversion, health behavior programs like Weight Watchers and Alcoholics Anonymous, and the small percent of organizations that have understood the real meaning of lean and significantly transformed their culture leader by leader, work group by work group.